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Participatory, inclusive and safe early childhood: a summary of a research and action project

Renata Mena Brasil do Couto, Eliane Gomes, Leandro Castro and Irene Rizzini

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The International Center for Research and Policy on Childhood (CIESPI) is both a research and a reference center operating in conjunction with the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio). It is dedicated to the development of studies and social projects about children, young people, their families and their communities. Its goal is to inform policies and social practices for these populations thus contributing to children's full development and for the promotion of their rights.



Rio de Janeiro, November 2024.

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1. Introduction: about the participatory, inclusive and safe early childhood project

National and international research recognizes the importance of assuring children's rights from the earliest years of life as being fundamental for children's development. Since 2020, the staff of CIESPI has been working in conjunction with the Rio community of Rocinha to analyze how the context of early childhood in a low-income community can be improved and to contribute to debates, policies and actions on the topic. The Brazil project was part of a five-country exercise which chose the lenses of inclusion, participation and safety to examine early childhood education. These lenses were chosen because of the extensive interest in them in early childhood research, law and practice as described below.

In this project, inclusion means guaranteeing the opportunities for all children to enjoy their rights such as rights to education and health. It includes not just inclusion in existing resources but also the development of resources where they are lacking. Participation means promoting, listening and dialogue so that young children and their families can express their points of view and participate in the decisions that affect their lives. Safety means

the necessity for the protection that minimizes the occurrence and impact of violence, poverty and other kinds of stress. Below we describe the main legal, constitutional, and theoretical underpinnings of these rights. Since they cover many activities leaving actors forced to choose which activities to prioritize, this research had as a major goal discovering what was most important in the concepts to people on the ground, parents, children, teachers, and community activists. These insights are important and can guide the decisions as to what to prioritize.

1.1 Involving the reference community

The project from the beginning was designed to involve participation of the reference community at all key points. The reference community, Rocinha, is a long-time partner of CIESPI. That long term relationship made possible the cooperation and involvement of the community.

Rocinha has about 150,000 residents and is located on a steep hill in the city of Rio de Janeiro with two main roads but most residents access their homes through alleyways and steps. The community is low-income but has a bustling small business life, and a number of churches and nonprofit organizations. The community has over thirty registered Early Childhood Education Centers or ECCEs distributed among public centers, non-profits that are subsidized by the municipality (known in Portuguese as

creches conveniadas) and private centers¹.

As an element of the partnership between CIESPI and the community in this project, the Institute took on several initiatives to assist children in the community. The Institute established a group of youth living in the community and trained them to visit ECCEs and listen to, read to and play with young children. The group was called the *trupe brincante* or play group. There were twenty-five such visits which reached about 250 children. The youth's observations during the sessions were used as part of the research material. CIESPI staff also organized with neighborhood and other groups health campaigns to promote COVID vaccinations for children 5-11 who as a group were under vaccinated. The community was kept informed about this action research throughout including by ten bulletins available on the CIESPI² website about various aspects of the project.

The research concluded with four community meetings where residents and health, mental health, and social service professionals debated their chief concerns about the context of early childhood in the community. In total, three hundred people attended the sessions in the local sports center. In the fourth session agreed on the "Community Letter" setting out their priorities for change to engage the relevant municipal departments and professional bodies. The main objectives are to promote improvements especially in the areas

of the shortage of ECCE places, the treatment of children with disabilities particularly those on the autism spectrum and discrimination against children of color.

At every stage of the project, staff consulted the project's community consultative group who helped choose ECCEs, the youth play group, the respondents, and were active in the four community meetings.

1.2 The respondents

Our goal was to interview a variety of relevant actors in the area of early childhood education. These included twenty men and women between the ages of seventeen and fifty-three who were either parents or who had primary responsibility for children. By design, they had different levels of schooling, family configurations, and came from different parts of the community (conditions are quite different in different parts of Rocinha.) The vast majority currently had children attending ECCEs. Twenty teachers or ECCE directors were interviewed some of whom also lived in the community. They were divided between the public, nonprofit, and private centers and worked in various parts of the community. Despite our best efforts, we were unable to include a male teacher for this group. Sixteen community key actors were also recruited to respond to our questions. Some were paid staff, and some volunteers in a variety of organizations that are part of the Brazilian System of Guarantee of Rights,

including social assistance, education, sports, culture, religious, communications and social movement groups. Eleven of these groups were in Rocinha, five in a neighboring middle/upper income neighborhood, and two further away. The great majority had limited programs for young children. In addition, conversations were arranged with thirty children between the ages of three and seven who attended ECCE's and one municipal school. Each group were visited a number of times to develop a conversation with the help of drawings and photographs. Lastly, we used material from the 300 children involved with the activities led by the group of young people trained by the CIESPI team (trupe brincante).

2. Inclusion

Inclusion is still a struggle in Brazil despite the country's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (2006)³, the creation of a National Policy on Special Education from the Perspective of Inclusive Education (2008)⁴ and the passage of Law #13.146/2015 which established the Brazilian Law on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities⁵. Chapter IV, Article 28 of this law imposes on the public sector the responsibility to train and accompany the support professionals in public and private schools.

Parents had a lot to say about inclusion

although the interviewers often had to describe the term since it was not a common word in family discussions. They talked about aspects of inclusion related to access to education, health care, leisure, accessibility, transport and income.

In relation to education, a considerable number of parents understood inclusion from the perspective of accompanying the process of their children's education, assisting their development and learning. *"Inclusion for me is to have a mother, a father, grandmother...all the world involved in the education of the child"*.

Inclusion also appeared in the sense of young children being welcomed in educational spaces through interactions, being listened to, and coexistence through practices that contributed to the common good. For the teachers in the ECCEs, their institutions valued the practice of including all children, listening to what they had to say, understanding their particularities and permitting their participation in the activities and so by stimulating their development. We note here the overlap between the two terms inclusion and participation.

The teachers linked inclusion particularly to children with disabilities pointing out that interaction with their classmates, the use of specific methodologies, the presence of qualified staff, and partnerships with the families were fundamental for contributing to the learning of such children.

But there were barriers to including these children in early educational spaces especially the lack of specialized support in the classrooms, an issue that was also mentioned by parents.

The parent respondents pointed out that schools needed to offer a greater number of professionals qualified to work with those children with any disability, mental health or chronic illness which could impact their development and learning. Parents and teachers pointed out that children with disabilities had the greatest difficulties obtaining a place in a school. It was the same for infants. Parents often concealed a diagnostic test for children with disabilities out of fear of prejudice or losing a place in a school. While some parents redoubled their efforts to get a child with disabilities into school, others had not learned to value education because they had not had access when they were children.

"These children are already born needing to run behind the others. In the competition they are not on the same level of equality".

"A mother does not know how to deal with a child and has difficulties knowing whether a child is on the spectrum or just likes being on her own. A mother prefers to take the child out of school because there are always complaints and she doesn't know what to do".

Our key informants pointed out that the hours EC&Cs were open were incompatible with the reality of work demands on parents and the

long distances to and from work and the schools.

The early education teachers knew that the lack of professional intermediaries besides increasing absenteeism, harmed the work given that the teacher could not offer the necessary support for the student who needed special attention. Some schools counted on itinerant support teachers connected to the Multi-Functional Resource Room⁶. These professionals set out an individual educational plan for students who have a medical diagnosis. While this initiative is highly valued, the time these professionals have at any institution is way less than the demand. About a quarter of the teachers interviewed said that they had noticed an increase in students with disabilities in the prior year, a huge increase.

The physical structure of schools was mentioned for inclusion by teachers because many spaces and buildings they occupied were not designed for educational purposes. Overcrowded classed rooms and the lack of support for teachers were on the list of obstacles for inclusion. Other challenges included ethnic-racial discrimination, the limited care offered by certain families to their children, and the connection between some family members and the retail drug market. Families with children with disabilities also had difficulties getting health services. Racism affected the self-esteem of non-white children making many of them stigmatized and seen as people without a future, limiting the investment in their education⁷.

Some children suffered from family conflicts, privations, violation of rights and alcohol and drug abuse which affected the capacity of adults to give them care. Armed conflict could cause school closings interrupting the cycles of learning. Shortage of basic services in the community especially basic sanitation and transportation were other challenges.

Parents suggested a variety of measures to increase inclusion such as guaranteed access

to the internet for families through public programs, an increase in the number of teachers and the presence of relevant specialists such as child psychiatrists, audiologists, and social assistants.

In general, parents said they liked the ECCEs their children attended. A majority commented that they liked the planned activities which taught their children to be resourceful, to speak and to be independent.

Supply and demand

The current national government has lifted previous tough restrictions on overall federal spending and as a result there has recently been large increases in spending for early childhood.

In 2019, 38.9% of children aged 0-3 years and 11 months in Brazil were enrolled in school despite the fact that the National Plan for Education required 50% of those children being enrolled in 2024. The rate of enrollment was 55% from the wealthiest 25% of families compared to 26% from families in the lowest income quartile¹⁴. This difference shows an enormous disadvantage for poorer families. Families with children with disabilities and families with difficulty accessing the internet for online applications for a place are specifically disadvantaged. Moreover, many ECCE centers only offer a half day program for each child, leaving families juggling care issues. But the advent of President Lula's third administration in 2023 brought with it a new support for early childhood. Between 2019 and 2023, the number of early childhood places in public centres increased by 296,000 or 12.1%¹⁵. Between 2018 and 2019 the total federal spending for children and adolescents increased from R\$91 billion to R\$124 billion, an increase of 51%¹⁶.

2.1 The lack of early childhood places

A key issue was the importance of access to places in ECCEs. A majority of respondents said it was difficult for some families to get access to places. *“Not everyone succeeds. Because there are few places”*. The parents of babies and of children with disabilities alleged that it was more challenging for them because of the special attention their children needed. While there was a shortage of places in municipals schools, many families found it difficult to pay the costs of private schools. Some who previously used private schools, had to stop during the pandemic when unemployment and financial difficulties increased. We should draw attention to the lack of information about how the enrolment process worked since a number of families said they did not know how these decisions were made. The information in ECCEs on the municipal website was not accessible to all families.

A majority of the teacher respondents confirmed the parents’ perspective that there was more demand than supply of places. Given that early childhood education is obligatory for children from four on, there are too few places.

What teachers did not like, was the lack of communication between the schools and families, the reduced number of professionals in the schools, the lack of individual attention, the lack of adaptation to children with disabilities, questions of mental health and chronic diseases and the quality of the food. Teachers also

mentioned low-income parents’ need for free bus passes so they could take their children to different places; the establishment of support centers for families where they could talk about their children’s education both at home and at school; and the establishment of Multi-functional Resource Rooms in the community to assist with children with disabilities.

When our respondents asked what would improve the services offered, they mentioned an increase in the number of full-day places, offering teachers more training, language courses, emergency health services, sports activities, greater accessibility, and professionals with key specialties. They also cited the need to improve the schools’ infrastructure. Teachers mentioned the need for free after school programs.

2.2 Inclusion in the community

It was clear to our respondents that education did not only relate to the world of school. Children learned in their daily interactions with adults and with other children. Spaces which encourage interactions are fundamental. In Rocinha, there are virtually no places where mothers, fathers and children can be together. There are no adequate squares where children can play and run with safety.

“In a community you need a physical space which doesn’t exist here because of unbridled growth. You don’t have squares, you don’t have

playground equipment, you don't have access to places where you can ride a bicycle or roller-skate. In reality, the space in this community is a dormitory, Rocinha is a big dormitory".

Our interviews showed that many of our respondents did not know of spaces that existed for their children. Increasing the dialogue between the few spaces that offer activities including non-profits, social movements, religious organizations and the social protection networks could facilitate opportunities for families.

To be included, families need the concrete actions of the state to promote changes and guarantee the resources that will promote the well-being of children and their families.

2.3 Different children are treated differently

Most parents said that some children in Rocinha were treated differently from other and they single out children who did not receive the support they needed from their families. This could have been because the parents worked long hours and so could not follow the daily life of the children or because of their precarious financial position including unemployment. The lack of early childhood places and the absence places for children to play in the community added to the sense of inequality in the community. Some of the key actor respondents pointed to geographical differences in the community.

"Here inside (Rocinha) there are many social

differences. There are areas where the children do not have sanitation, they do not have a bathroom".

The poorest children who live in hunger, who are out of school, experience situations of violence and have no one watching them are treated differently. There is a prejudice against children whose parents are drug or alcohol abusers, whose caretakers are part of a gay couple or have mothers or fathers with disabilities.

One of the community respondents emphasized racial/ethnic discrimination.

"I think the locality reinforces it, but also the issue of race, because Rocinha with this mestizo perspective with all the quotation marks is a strong mixture. So, I think there are many stereotypes, especially about the children who are black skinned when you walk on the street and see the children who are on the street and most of them are black skinned boys".

The differences in skin color place people against each other in the same community since colorism establishes a racial hierarchy, distinguished by skin tone whether it is lighter or darker.

When asked how support could be offered to excluded children in their homes, our community respondents mentioned: dialoguing with families; respecting and supporting the families' various compositions; getting to know and understand the behavior of children;

challenging the precariousness and absence of services; and reflecting on living conditions, especially sanitation, education and the absence of places to play. These respondents while recognizing the importance of local, collective initiatives and projects, said that these could not eliminate the negative effects of limited and ineffective state action which prioritized dealing with armed violence.

Many respondents recognized that poverty interfered with children's access to education. Teachers said that poverty limited access to goods and services. Poor nutrition caused sleepiness, apathy and difficulty concentrating. The shortage of health services and resources for transit which limited circulation caused problems. Family problems related to poverty ended up making some children more agitated, sad, irritated or aggressive in school.

A community member made the issue clear. *"With hunger you cannot reason.... With hunger you cannot achieve anything"*.

But opportunity was important too. If a child, even when poor, has the same opportunity to learn as a wealthy child, that would give them the capacity to learn and to study.



3. Participation: the legal background

In 1989, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), establishing an unprecedented framework of legally binding human rights for all children, including the right to participation. Brazil was an early signatory. UNCRC's Article 12 outlines the right to express a view and have that view given due weight, commonly called the right to participation⁸.

In order to fully implement this right, Article 12 must be read and interpreted in connection with other participatory rights guaranteed in the UNCRC, including the right to freedom of expression (Article 13), freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (Article 14), freedom of association (Article 15), and access to information (Article 17). Thus participation, according to the UNCRC, includes but is more than 'taking part': it includes being involved in decision-making.

Key features of the Brazilian laws on participation are that appropriately trained professionals must ensure the participation of children in the formulation of policies according to their age⁹ and that children have the right to their opinions and of expression and participating in political life¹⁰. Article 53 of the latter law (1990 Statute on the Child and the Adolescent) provides that parents or the responsible adults have the right to have

knowledge of the educational processes and to participate in the definitions of educational proposals.

3.1 Parents' views on participation

Our parent respondents had a very strong sense of what participation meant for them; their constant presence in the daily lives of their children, interacting with them and accompanying their development and learning.

"All of you must participate with the child. See him grow, be on his side. Because he depends on people. Don't maltreat him and give him an education".

Parents talked about playing with their children, about involving them in household tasks, drawing and painting with them, reading and listening to music. Those parents who could not read, talked about telling stories using the pictures in books. They emphasized the importance of making sure their children did their school homework though some admitted that they had not spent much time in school themselves and sometimes could not help their children.

Parents also talked about their children's participation in the life of the school. Most of the parents said that their children did not have any difficulty participating in school activities. But they allowed that the lack of dialogue between the schools and the families, the reduced number of teachers and limited internet access during

Covid-19 did impact on children's participation. One mother of a child with a disability and a chronic illness said that her son suffered exclusion in the ECCEC because of his limitations and the fear the school had that he would get hurt.

Parents concerns for themselves stressed the right to knowledge about the school life of their children. Parents thought it important that they had the opportunity to accompany and give support to their children in their school activities and participate in meetings and other activities proposed by the ECCECs. This was not an easy task especially for single mothers who had to care for children and the household on their own and for those who worked outside the home and who needed permission from their bosses to attend school events. When parents couldn't make to an event, another family member often stepped in.

3.2 Teachers' views on parent participation

Obstacles to parent participation according to teachers included such personal issues as lack of commitment, seriousness, maturity or understanding about the importance of early childhood education. But these in turn often reflected the lack of educational opportunities parents had experienced.

But teachers in general thought that the majority of families were active in planned school activities. The schools invested in

these activities taking into account diversity and practical possibilities and they included pedagogical themes, commemorative dates such as birthdays, conversations as children entered or left the building, shows of the children's work, and trips. Participation also involved the schools sending such materials as drawings, paintings and lessons home with the child.

About a half of the respondents mentioned the participation of families as something fundamental in the life of the children and their education.

A teacher said: *"If a family does not participate, you can see the difference in the development of the child. A child needs care, needs the eye of everyone around him.... In early childhood education, the participation of the family is essential"*.

Along with these positive perspectives of parent participation, some teachers said that not all ECCECs provide for the participation of families perhaps because of the limited time spaces for such contacts. Some parents criticized the schools for not informing them about the daily school routines of their children or for not involving adults in the activities.

Teachers confirmed that parent work commitments were the principal obstacles to family participation. Employers rarely understood that an employee needed to be at a school event or that the child needs care when sick. Many children in consequence needed to be under the care of "creche mothers", neighbors

or friends including minors when the parents had to work. These networks of support are very important in communities and prevent children from being on their own in their homes or wandering the streets alone.

But at the end of the day most parents cared deeply about their children's education.

"A great majority of them worry very much about this notion that my child will have what I did not have, I will struggle, I will rail against, I will spend hours in the kitchen of my boss, but my child will not go through this".

3.3 Teachers' ideas about child participation in the school

For teachers, a key element of participation is that children are engaged in the school activities. It means the child being involved, interacting, playing, learning and succeeding in the activities in the child's own way. When a child is not involved, it is important to dialogue with the child, learn what he has to say, think together and stimulate his creativity through activities that arouse his interest and are pleasurable.

Teachers say that the children do participate actively in the process of learning and that the method most often used to engage them is the "circle of conversation". During this activity, children interact with each other as equals and with teachers conversing about various topics related to the daily activity inside

and outside the school. The notion that children could be protagonists in the learning process appeared in several responses.

"They must be protagonists in the process of learning. I see a majority of teachers are in the movement to stimulate the curiosity, stimulate a child to form hypotheses, to ask, to question".

There are, however, teachers outside of this movement who promote conservative practices meaning that a teacher teaches and a student learns. So, child protagonism in the process of learning is still a struggle.

Teachers say there are other ways to stimulate participation outside of the conversation circles which include dialogue during an activity or at the end of one and paying attention to the expressions and behavior of the children. If the child is a baby the teachers said: *"It is all visual: those who clap their hands, try to sing. It's a way of showing what they are enjoying and when they are not, turn you back and try something else".*

While teachers thought that children were in general participative, the behavior of adults and the character of child and family impacted how the children presented themselves. Some adults had difficulty understanding children.

"Oh adults! Adults for me are the obstacle. Because people are rooted in extremely traditional practices. At times they cannot see the child".

3.4 The participation of children in the community

The participation of young children in the community was an entirely different matter. Parents said their children did nothing in Rocinha and they did not know any accessible and interesting places for them to be. The local squares were not maintained and there was no playground equipment. There was a constant risk of violent outbursts and stray bullets which restricted children being on the streets. But some parents knew about the few protected places such as the sports center, and small sections of forest.

Not surprisingly, the people who ran organizations in Rocinha had a somewhat different view of neighborhood resources. They pointed to free activities they ran in sports, music, health and education, and access to books and toys, and religious activities. But parents needed to know the rules and the hours of such activities and the times could be a problem for parents. Distance was another factor. For example, the sports center in Rocinha is at one end of the community at the bottom of the hill making access difficult for people living in the middle and top of the community. Partly due to crowded streets but also because of service levels, bus transit was inadequate.

But these community respondents also recognized that they were unable to meet the demand. They had financial and space problems with expanding their services. And services

for 0–5-year-olds were particularly limited. Those who offered no services for this age group said they would be interested in doing so but there were financial barriers. A number of respondents said there was virtually no dialogue among organizations without which it was difficult for them to cooperate even to spread the word about each other's activities. The community respondents thought there were forces in the community to promote children's development but that the public sector had to step in to fill huge gaps in resources.

3.5 The views of the children

In addition to the thirty children who were interviewed in groups, the project established a group of young adolescent residents and trained them to go to ECFCs, listen to and talk with children zero to five and these sessions involved about 300 children. When they were asked what they liked to do, they said play in the street but added that their parents would usually not permit this. The children talked about places they did visit such as the beach, the zoo, parks and restaurants. When they were asked what they most liked to do they talked about running, jumping, eating, skipping, jumping rope, hide-and-seek, playing ball and musical chairs.

The young children also talked about the importance of their friends and their brothers and sisters.

We should note that the older children aged of six and seven interviewed said they did not always feel visible or listened to in school or at home. When asked for suggestions about getting noticed, the children said they would raise their hands and if this didn't work, they would cry out to get attention. Others said they would throw themselves on the floor or scream until they exploded.

4. Safety

Our third lens for examining the educational and developmental context for young children in Rocinha was safety.

A basic right to safety- for children in Brazil is contained in Articles 226 and 227 of the 1988 Brazilian Federal Constitution which state that: "*the family must enjoy special protection by the State; that it is the duty of the family, the society, and the government to protect children and adolescents; and that the law must severely punish abuse of, violence toward, and sexual exploitation of children and adolescents*"¹¹. These provisions are underlined and expanded upon in the Basic Law of Early Childhood (2016)¹² which provides for children's rights to participation, inclusion, respect for individuality and diversity and the reduction of inequalities all of which have a relationship to safety. The non-profit sector reinforces these ideas in the National Coalition

for Early Childhood's (RNPI) National Plan for Early Childhood (2021)¹³.

4.1 Safety in the community

In a dramatic recognition of a harsh reality, a majority of our respondents, parents, teachers and community respondents thought that children 0-5 were not safe in Rocinha. This sense hung like a heavy cloud over every aspect of life.

Our respondents talked about a variety of sources of violence including the actions of drug traffickers who walk through the streets carrying heavy weapons such AK47s, the undisciplined police response which send bullets flying through the air, the absence of any regular policing, and ubiquitous drug selling.

The police raids are so dangerous and unwelcomed that they are referred to as "invasions".

For all these reasons children were simply not safe on the streets. The geography of Rocinha adds to the problem. Apart from two main streets, access to homes is through concrete or mud alleys or twisting staircases. That means many blind spots where there are no eyes on the streets. It also makes policing very difficult as traffickers can easily escape police patrols.

"There is a lot of exposure. In the case of the community, at any moment the children are at

risk of a stray bullet, there is a lot of exposure, even to play they are not safe at home. And I attest to that".

The impact on young children is large and varied. One parent explained:

"She (my daughter) is bored because she is not accustomed to be locked up all day inside...she is irritated, she cries, somedays she screams, but unfortunately that is what you have to do because I do not have the confidence to let her outside".

Some parents saw their children become agitated and afraid when they heard fireworks and gunshots in the community.

"At three years old she already understands that it is a shot, that it will come from somewhere. She says ma, ma, shots, shots. She cannot see an armed person without saying I am going to die, he is going to kill me. I don't know whether she saw this or heard someone say it. She has become an expert in such things".

"She talked about that there was no safety on Street 1 and Street 4 where there are unpredictable conflicts. On the way to the school there is a point where they sell drugs".

One counter-intuitive aspect of the dominance of drug traffickers to safety was explained by a young member of the CIESPI team who lived in the community. When asked about safety at night said that while the gangs were violent, they imposed harsh punishments on crimes like assault, theft and rape and that

she felt comparatively safe in the community. She found the use of motor bikes that ferry people up and down the hills safer to use than buses.

The overcrowded community brings other threats to safety through health risks.

The small size of homes, (while several stories high, the basic floor plan can be as small as 2 two square meters) and the narrow alley way streets that separated homes were such that many homes lacked light and air flows and in consequence the rate of such diseases as tuberculosis and leprosy are very high in the community. Uncollected garbage and unfenced flat roofs are other sources of hazard.

4.2 Safety in the early childhood education centers

Most respondents thought children were safe in ECCEs. The centers had procedures for outbreaks of armed conflict, how to hide the children in the safest place, locking the main doors and not allowing anyone to enter or to leave.

"All the staff are very attentive. Everyone is very careful".

The centers also offered relief from health hazards. Children received healthy meals, had good sanitation, and could be bathed. While the centers were often not designed to be places for small children, staff took every precaution to

remove hazards. Some had outdoor spaces and the air circulation was in general much better than in some of the children's crowded homes. Yet more could be done with public investments to deal with, for example, unguarded staircases and the lack of fire exits.

A teacher explained the atmosphere of safety.

"The best for them is when they are well, physically and emotionally in a place where people transmit this to them. For me safety is doing for them everything so that they feel well wherever they are and whatever they are doing".

4.3 Safety in the home

In general, all groups of respondents thought children safe in their homes. Here children were safe from stray bullets and street violence. Children saw safety as being close to a parent and parents saw safety as being close to their children.

Parents, however, talked about the need for a constant adult presence with the children and the difficulties of arranging this when parents were working. Parents and teachers talked about the need for parents to be constantly alert for the safety of their children and elaborated about what a child needed in the home.

"There must be a family, with a healthy structure which understands the needs of the child, which

understands that a child is an individual and needs complete support to grow”.

Another parent echoed that comment:

“You must have a healthy family structure. It doesn’t mean that there is a family with a mother and father, with two fathers, mothers...But there must be a family which has in the nuclear family of the child a safe structure which understands the needs of the child, which understands... that the child is an individual who needs every support to grow. This is what I think is safety for a [young] child”.

There were, however, some concerns about children’s safety in the home particularly among the community and teacher respondents. As a community resident put it:

“The home, which should be the most important safe place for children, the temple, the place where children feel most welcome and safe, isn’t always”.

Teachers saw problems in some family dynamics such as domestic violence, sexual violence and the lack of resources. They also noted structural problems in the home such as cracks and mold and the risk of landslides in the rainy season.

Some community respondents thought that the lack of financial and emotional support for families many of whom came from generations of poverty left children without the necessary supports in the home. But the overall impression of all groups of respondents

were that the majority of children were safe and supported in their homes.

The majority of children thought they were safe in their homes and some of them also mentioned being safe at church. Some said that in particular they were frightened of cockroaches, mice, rain, and the dark. While in general the children said they would seek out an adult if they were frightened some talked about getting help from super-heroes. Parents were seen as the central protective figures.

5. Final considerations

Our project lenses of participation, inclusion and protection illuminate important aspects of promoting young children’s development.

It is clear from all groups of respondents that ECCE’s provide a critical respite from the struggles of living in a low-income community constantly threatened by violence. They are a major source of safety, physical and emotional care, nutrition, and constitute healthy environments.

At the beginning of this report, we described our goal of discovering community residents’ priorities for inclusion, participation and safety. All types of safety are high on our respondents’ lists though safety from violence heads up their concerns. Parents emphasize the importance of their participation with children

in the home and a wish for a greater knowledge of what is happening during their children's school day. All respondents were concerned about children who were not included in school by reason of shortage of places and about all children in school being included in the schools' activities. They mentioned very poor children, black children, and children with mental health challenges as those most likely not to be included. As policy makers, activists and lawyers consider what aspects of these rights to pursue, they should bear in mind the priorities of the people most affected by the lack of those rights.

We wish to emphasize the creativity that parents showed to include their children, enlarge their participation and offer security to them. But we also understand that the objective and subjective conditions of each family create and limit the opportunities for promoting the development and education of the children. Full support from the state, now lacking, is fundamental for the full protection and assistance for young people.

Essential to this process, the teachers in ECCEs evaluate their work positively. But they point to the struggles caused by the lack of investment in public education and safety. Parents and teachers stress the importance of family participation in their children's education. If on one hand, teachers recognize and reinforce the activities proposed by the schools, they also understand how socio-

economic issues limit this participation.

All groups of participants stressed the importance of providing alternative spaces with activities to promote development. At present there are very few such spaces available for the young children.

All groups agreed with the main struggles faced by children 0-5 being the gaps in public policies and services. The lack of places, and fragile inclusion of those who enter but encounter difficulties to remain in school are important. While the three public health clinics in Rocinha offer basic and emergency services, there are huge gaps in specialized care for example mental health services. Public safety services which should protect children, and the population as a whole, leave residents in constant harm of violence. The gaps in basic sanitation, garbage collection, public transportation and the energy system are historic problems in the community. Basic children's rights cannot be assured without public investments which tackle these problems.

We believe that the mobilization of different groups and collectives along with better communication among the social media could contribute to amplifying the local priorities and spelling out and monitoring policies capable of improving life in the community. There is a need to strengthen local networks where these issues are raised and solutions necessary for the community are addressed. We are happy to accompany and support such a movement.

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Notes

1 In Brazil, such centers for children 0-3 are known as creches and for children 4-6 as preschools. The term creche, however, means many other kinds of child gathering places in English.

2 For more information, www.ciespi.org.br.

3 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities>.

4 [EDUCAO INCLUSIVA: POLITICA NACIONAL DE EDUCACAO ESPECIAL \(mec.gov.br\)](http://educacao.inep.gov.br/educacao-especial), 2008.

5 Law #13.146/2015.

6 This organization, A Sala de Recursos Multifuncionais, has as its purpose supporting and offering special education services.

7 It is important to note that racism is a form of violence that impacts child development (Comitê Científico do Núcleo Ciência pela Infância, 2021). Law 10.639/03 amended by Law 11.645/08 includes schools' obligation to teach Afro/Brazilian, African and indigenous history and culture.

8 www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child.

9 Marco Legal 2016, para unico, www.gov.br/mdh/pt-br/navegue-por-temas/crianca-e-adolescente/acoes-e-programas-de-gestoes-anteriores/primeira-infancia#:~:text=O%20Marco%20Legal%20da%20Primeira,e%20m.

10 Law nº 8,069, July 13, 1990, https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/leis/l8069.htm.

11 The Brazilian 1988 Constitution as revised in 2017, [Brazil 1988 \(rev. 2017\) Constitution - Constitute \(constituteproject.org\)](http://www.constituteproject.org/Brazil1988(rev.2017)Constitution-Constitute).

12 In Portuguese this is Marco Legal da Primeira Infância, Lei nº 13.257/2016, www.bing.com/search?q=Marco+legal+da+primeira+infancia&form=ANNTH1&ref=8b2b8d87d64e4b8eb7d787b73a170422&pc=HC-TS.

13 In Portuguese it is the Rede Nacional Primeira Infância and its website is at www.observaprimeirainfancia.org.br/boas-praticas/660/rede-nacional-primeira-infancia-rnpi.

14 For a fuller discussion of this issue see Malcolm Bush and Renata Brazil, Children in Brazil aged 0-3 urgently need early education but many lack places to attend: immediate action need, CIESPI /PUC-Rio Early Childhood Bulletin #1, www.ciespi.org.br and FUNDAÇÃO MARIA CECILIA SOUTO VIDIGAL - FMCSV. Desafios do acesso à creche no Brasil: subsídios para o debate. São Paulo: 2020. Accessible at: fmcsv.org.br.

15 Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais (Inep/MEC) 2024.

16 <https://www.unicef.org/brazil/comunicados-de-imprensa/dados-sobre-investimentos-em-criancas-e-adolescentes-agora-estao-disponiveis-no-siga-brasil>.

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